J. J. Lucas

A Wonderful Prophecy

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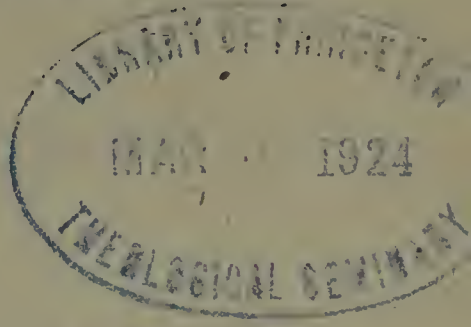

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A WONDERFUL PROPHECY.

What is this wonderful prophecy? It is that the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ shall be proclaimed unto all the nations, and unto the uttermost part of the earth, and that then the end of this world or age shall come. This prophecy was spoken by the Lord Jesus to His disciples a few days before His death on the Cross. It was spoken in answer to their question—"When shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" Matthew 24: 3. He tells them the things that will take place before His coming. The temple at Jerusalem will be utterly destroyed: "there shall not be left here one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down:" there will arise false Christs and false prophets who shall deceive many: there will be wars and rumours of wars; for nation shall rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom;" there shall be famines and pestilences and earthquakes in divers places; iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold. He warns His disciples that they are not to be deceived as though these things were the signs of His coming and of the end of the world; and then He tells them the sign by which they are to know that the end is near. What is that sign? It is the world-wide proclamation of His Gospel. These

are the words of the prophecy. "This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matthew 24: 14. "The Gospel must first be published among all nations." Mark 13: 10. Just before His separation from His disciples and ascension to Heaven, He told them that "repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem." Luke 24: 47. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, "Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven." Acts. 1: 9-11.

The prophecy is not that all men will believe the Gospel and become His disciples before His coming again, but that it will be "published among all nations," and that, whether men receive or reject their testimony, His disciples will be witnesses unto Him, unto the uttermost part of the earth.

Consider for a moment that this prophecy was spoken, not in figurative language capable of many meanings, but in clear simple words understood and acted on by the disciples; consider that when spoken 1900 years ago, it seemed impossible of fulfilment; first,

because the disciples of Jesus were Galilean Jews, of limited education and narrow vision, with strong prejudices against having any dealings with the people of other nations; second, because the carrying of the Gospel to the uttermost part of the earth required the martyr spirit, the spirit that leads men and women to face dangers of every kind by sea and land, not for love of country to extend its dominion, not for gain or honour or rule over the people of these far away nations, but to proclaim to them the Gospel of the Lord Jesus; and third, the fulfilment of the prophecy required linguistic gifts of a high order to master the languages of other nations so as to translate the Gospel into them. And yet what seemed an impossible task was immediately attempted; the prejudices of the first disciples were removed and the world vision given them; the martyr spirit of devotion constrained them to count not their lives dear in carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth; disciples with linguistic gifts consecrated them to the service of the Lord in translating the Gospel into the languages of all nations, so that it has been translated into five hundred and eleven languages.

Look at India alone, and see the thousands of missionaries and preachers all over India preaching the Gospel; the hundreds of Christian Churches with a membership increasing by thousands every year; the thousands of Mission Schools in which the Gospel is taught to tens of thousands of pupils; the thousands of Zenanas and homes in which Christian women teach and read the Gospel to the women and children;

the hundreds of Mission Hospitals and Dispensaries where tens of thousands of the poor and sick of every caste are ministered to out of love to the Lord Jesus; the millions of Gospel portions and tracts in the different languages of India which, year by year, are distributed far and wide,—last year (1917) about one million copies of the Gospel sold or given away—all these unite in witnessing that this prophecy of the Lord Jesus is being fulfilled in India.

What has been said of the widespread preaching of the Gospel in India may be said also of its proclamation in China. In fact, there are more missionaries from Great Britain, Europe, and America in China than in India, besides the thousands of Chinese witnesses. Twenty years ago, in the Boxer uprising, 20,000 followers of the Lord Jesus, missionaries from Europe and America, and Chinese disciples, witnessed unto death to their faith in Him. And so I might go from country to country, and show that in Japan, Korea, Formosa, Siam, Africa, Arabia, Persia, and throughout the Turkish Empire, as well as in all the States of Europe and America and in the great Islands of the Ocean, the Gospel is being published through the printed page and proclaimed by the voice of witnesses in the languages of these countries.

In the last report of the British and Foreign Bible Society (1917) we read that during the last four years the Society sent out forty million volumes—each volume being a Bible or a Testament or a complete copy of one of the Gospels; and during the same year the Gospel has been translated into seven fresh languages.

This one Bible Society expended last year over forty six lakhs of rupees on the translation, publication and circulation of the Christian Scriptures in many languages throughout the greater part of the world. Other Bible Societies, as the American, also expend lakhs of rupees every year for this same object. It must not be forgotten that these large sums are the free will offerings of the followers of the Lord Jesus for the spread of His Gospel by means of the printed page throughout the world.

If it be said that the Gospel has not been proclaimed in Afghanistan and Thibet, one answer is that translations of the Gospels have been made into the languages of these countries and distributed among the people; another answer is that a goodly number of Afghans and Thibetans have become disciples of the Lord Jesus and are witnessing for Him to their countrymen, as in Peshawar, Leh, and other places; and yet another answer is that quite a number of missionaries are living on the borders of these countries, telling the message of the Gospel to pilgrims, traders and travellers who go to and fro, and through them it is taken to towns and villages far and wide. In view of these facts, while we may not say that the prophecy of the worldwide preaching of the Gospel has been fulfilled in these countries, yet we may say that it is in course of fulfilment—the prophecy not saying how thorough or extensive the witness must be in each nation; and may we not also say that it is in course of rapid fulfilment in all nations?

Putting all these facts together, what inferences may fairly be drawn from them?

First this, that the other prophecies spoken by the Lord Jesus in the same connection shall in their own time be fulfilled. For example, as He left the temple at Jerusalem for the last time, He foretold that it would be demolished so completely that not one stone would be left upon another, and that this House of God would remain desolate until He came again, and that then the Jews would call Him Blessed; Matt., 23: 37-39; 24, 3, 14, 32-35; Mark, 13: 1-10; Luke, 13: 34, 35. This prophecy is in course of fulfilment. In the year 70 A.D., the temple was destroyed in the siege of Jerusalem by the Roman Army, although the Emperor Titus had given orders that it should not be destroyed; and in the year 137 A.D., the Roman Emperor Hadrian had a plow driven over its site. Centuries later, many of the great stones of the Temple were gathered out of the ruins by Moslems and used in building the walls of the Mosque of Omar which stands on the site of the Temple. These stones are to-day silent witnesses to the fulfilment of the prophecy concerning them. And if their witness be not sufficient, then listen, on any Friday of the year, as I did years ago, to the wailing of Jewish pilgrims in what is known as "The Wailing Place of the Jews," just outside the Mosque of Omar, wailing as they remember that these stones were once in the walls of their Temple. And so these Jewish pilgrims from many countries are also unconsciously witnessing to the fulfilment of the words of the Lord Jesus.

Again, the Jewish people themselves are witnesses, present in every nation, to the fulfilment of His

prophecy that they as a people and nation shall not pass away until the prophecies He had spoken concerning the desolation of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and the preaching of the Gospel to all nations, are fulfilled. This prophecy is being fulfilled. The Jews are a people without a country of their own; they have been scattered for centuries among the nations of the earth, and yet they have not been swallowed up by these nations, as people usually are who dwell a few centuries in a foreign country. Their continuance and persistence as a separate people, not in one or two countries, as for instance the Parsees in India have maintained their racial separation, but in almost every nation for centuries, makes them "the miracle of history."

From the eleventh to the fourteenth centuries, their history is a succession of massacres. They have been persecuted alike by Christian and Moslem nations. One of the blackest spots in the history of the last eighteen hundred years is the way the nations have tried to wipe out the Jewish race; but all in vain. There is no parallel to this in the history of the world. Why is it that the great nations of the earth, Christian and Moslem, have not succeeded in swallowing up or sweeping away this little nation, so that after centuries of massacre they live and preserve their individuality and nationality—although without a temple, without a priesthood, and without a country? The answer is this, that the Lord Jesus has spoken the word that as a nation they shall not pass away until they see Him again and call Him blessed. Hence, in vain the Roman Emperor gave

the command that the Temple should not be destroyed. Hence, in vain have the great nations, by massacre and persecution, tried to wipe them off the face of the earth. The word of the Lord has preserved them like the burning bush which the Prophet Moses saw—"Behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed." Ex. 3: 12. The Jewish rulers and priests and people would not have Jesus as their King. When the Roman Governor, Pilate, said unto the Jews —"Behold your King;" they cried out, "Away with him, away with him, crucify him." Pilate saith unto them: "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no King but Cæsar." John 19: 15.

And so up to this day the Jewish nation has no king save the Kings and Emperors, the Kaisers, of the nations where they have been scattered. To-day the Jews are as they have been for centuries, "A people without a country." The total Jewish population of the world to-day is eleven million five hundred thousand, of whom only seventy-eight thousand live in their own country, and they live there as foreigners. (Encyclopædia Britannica. Eleventh Edition).

As we look at the great stones of the Jewish temple now in the wall of the Mosque of Omar; as we hear the wailing of the Jewish pilgrims as they kiss those stones; as we recall the names of the great Jewish bankers of different nations distributing gold and silver over the world as they wish, and controlling the finances of great nations—a member of one of these great Jewish Banking families now Secretary of State for India—and some of

these families ready for a century past to give millions of gold and silver to Kings and Emperors to restore Jerusalem and the Temple site to them; as we read the recent proclamation of the General of the Armies of the Allies pledging the nations he represents, Christian though those nations be, to preserve the Mosque of Omar, and the armies of the Sultan of Turkey and of Germany also pledged to preserve it; as we behold this bush, the Jewish nation, burned with fire but not consumed—may we not, uniting these prophecies with that of the worldwide preaching of the Gospel also being fulfilled to-day, believe with all confidence that in due time all the words of the Lord Jesus will be abundantly and wonderfully fulfilled? A hundred and fifty years ago it was said—Look at India China, Japan, Korea, Siam, Africa, and other nations; the Gospel has not been translated into the languages of those countries, and hundreds of millions of their people have never even heard the name of Jesus, and yet He told His disciples that His Gospel would be proclaimed in all the nations unto the uttermost part of the earth. There is not the faintest sign of the fulfilment of this prophecy: How can we believe the Gospel when we find in it prophecies spoken by Jesus which seem to us empty words? Those words which seemed a hundred years ago impossible of fulfilment are no longer counted empty words. They are not cunningly devised fables, fabricated 1900 years ago; their fulfilment in these last days assures us that all the words of the Lord Jesus shall be fulfilled. We do well to take heed to them as unto a lamp shining in a dark

place until the day of His coming dawn. II Peter I : 20.

There is yet another inference justified by the fulfilment of this prophecy: It is that its fulfilment required divine power—a power greater than that wielded by Kings and Emperors.

What is the power that has constrained thousands of men and women to leave home and country to preach the Gospel in far away countries, among people of strange tongues and customs, often among illiterate people and barbarians, as, for example, were the people of the British Isles before missionaries brought the Gospel to them? What power is it that has led men and women of education and refinement to spend their lives in these countries, trying to win the people to become disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ; opening schools for their children, hospitals for their sick, homes for their orphans, and asylums for their blind and lepers?

I do not forget that many noble men, not missionaries, have left home and country and spent their lives in far off lands, but have they not gone as officers of the army or as members of a Civil Service, to rule over the people among whom they live? Have they not been moved by the not unnatural ambition of one day reaching positions of honour and authority in these countries? Merchants, too, go to the ends of the earth, but is it not usually with the object of making a fortune, if possible, and taking it back to their homeland? What is it that takes the missionary of the Lord Jesus to these countries and keeps him there to the end of life? He,

too, like his classmates in the School or College of the homeland, or like a brother or some member of his family, might have gone to that far away country as a member of the Civil Service or as a Barrister or a merchant, and he, too, might have risen to be a magistrate or a judge or to be head of some Department of Government, such as the Educational or Medical, or even to be the head of a Province. Why did he give up the prospect of positions of honour and wealth in his own country, as well as in the far away country—positions which his classmates, teachers and all who knew him prophesied he could attain if he wished? He is the only one who can answer this question, and it is the answer of the greatest of missionaries, the missionary who first preached the Gospel in Europe, and who was scourged and imprisoned for preaching it—"All that was gain to me, for Christ's sake I have counted it loss." Phil. 3 : 7. "For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that one died for all, therefore all died; and He died for all, that they that live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto Him who for their sakes died and rose again." II Cor. V. 14-15.

It is the love of Christ that has constrained these men and women—that love which led Him to the death of the Cross for them and for all men. He gave the command to go, and they have gone, counting it a privilege and honour to be His missionaries. This is the explanation of the fact—a fact that cannot be denied—that young men, not a few of them marked out for high positions in their own countries, by reason of their natural

gifts and education, as well as by the integrity of their character, have given up all such ambitions and gone to Africa, Arabia, China, Japan, Korea, Siam, India, Persia, throughout the Turkish Empire, and to distant Islands of the sea, as missionaries of the Lord Jesus, often like their Master misunderstood and rejected of men.

It is not with any desire of praising missionaries that I write this; had they sought the praise of the world, they would never have become missionaries. I write to show that the Lord Jesus has power to bring to pass His words; that the prophecy that His Gospel would be preached unto all nations required divine power for its fulfilment, a power greater than any on earth; a power not like that of some great man in his own generation and among his own people, which he cannot perpetuate, but a power put forth through centuries among people of many nations, and increasing with the passage of the centuries—that is the power Christ has put forth and is putting forth to-day among all the nations of the earth. And so the enthusiastic worldwide preaching of the Gospel adds yet another proof to the many that the Lord Jesus has an unseen and irresistible and divine power within the heart and over the lives of men, constraining them at His command to give up the things that are dearest to the heart—home, family, country, and the common ambitions of men and women.

There is yet another inference to be drawn from the worldwide preaching of the Gospel—It is that the coming again of the Lord Jesus may be near. His

disciples asked Him, "When shall these things be and what shall be the sign of thy coming and the end of the age?" He did not put away their question as foolish, but answered that they were not to be misled by false signs—such as great wars or famines or pestilences or earthquakes; that these would continue unto the end, but they are not the signs of His coming. That sign would be the preaching of the Gospel in every nation. He warned His disciples again and again that His coming would be sudden, "like the lightning which cometh out of the east and shineth even unto the west;" that men would be unprepared for it, just as they were in the days of the Prophet Noah, who foretold the coming of the flood, but whose words seemed idle tales to the men of his day; and so the flood came and swept them away. "For, as in those days which were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and they knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall the coming of the Son of Man be." Matt. 24: 37-39. By this very example the Lord Jesus warns us—"Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." Matthew 24: 42.

In the parable of the nobleman "going into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return," the Lord Jesus foretold that the attitude of the world to the Gospel and to Himself until His coming again would be that of the citizens who sent word after the nobleman, "We will not have this man to reign over us." Luke 19: 12-27. Has not this been the attitude of the world

to the Lord Jesus all through these centuries and up to the present day? Is not this the attitude of educated India and of all Moslem nations? Have the European nations crowned Him Lord of all? While this attitude fills the hearts of His disciples with sorrow, yet, instead of shaking their faith in the Gospel, it furnishes still an additional evidence of its truth.

Wherever we are able to test the truth of the prophecies of the Gospel they have stood the test. Hence our confidence in the fulfilment of the prediction that, when the Gospel has been preached unto all nations, then this age of war, famine, pestilence, and iniquity will come to an end, and the Lord Jesus will appear in great glory and power. We see this sign of His coming being fulfilled, and so we lift up our heads in hope. His coming is called "the Blessed Hope," Titus 2: 13. His last words as He left the world were words of Blessing, and thus He will come back blessing all who are His in every nation.

But to those who reject Him; to those who count His gracious promises only empty words; to those who scoff at them; to those who love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil; who through iniquity suppress the truth; to those who live according to their own depraved cravings; whose hearts overflow with all sorts of dishonesty, greed and malice; inventors of new forms of sin; faithless to their promises; without human pity; who, though knowing full well the sentence which God pronounces against actions such as theirs, as things which deserve death, yet they not only practise them but

even encourage and applaud others who do them (Romans 1 : 18-32)—to all these the coming of the Lord Jesus will be a day of wrath.

" If there is any truth in Scripture at all, this is true—that those who stubbornly refuse to submit to the Gospel, and to love and obey Jesus Christ, incur at the Last Advent an infinite and irreparable loss .... We all know the penal consequences which sin brings in its train even in this world. Remorse, unavailing sorrow, shame, fear, the sight of injury which we have done to those we love and which we cannot undo, incapacity for service,—all these are part and parcel of the fruit which sin bears. But they are not the wrath to come. They do not exhaust the judgment of God upon evil. Instead of discrediting it, they bear witness to it ; they are, so to speak, its forerunners ; the lurid clouds that appear here and there in the sky, but are finally lost in the dense mass of the thunderstorm." (Denney on Thessalonians, page 61).

The Gospel of Christ is not responsible for sin : it is its only remedy ; but until men are smitten with a sense of their guilt before God and feel that sin is an awful disease of the heart, incurable by men, they will not turn to God with a cry for forgiveness and deliverance. Hence the Gospel must proclaim the wrath of God against sin, and that the Lord Jesus has come to deliver from the darkened mind, the depraved heart, the polluted imagination, the vile affections, the guilty conscience, the hopelessness and despair into which sin has brought man. He came into the world to bring us back

to God: God so loved the world that He sent his Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world. He came to give Himself up of His own free will to the awful death of the Cross for our sins. He came to dwell in our hearts by His Holy Spirit. His name is Jesus, the Saviour from sin: His name is Immanuel, God with us,—the Saviour who is able to save from the guilt and slavery of sin, the Saviour who is coming again to bless those who are His, of every nation, delivering them from the wrath that is one day coming on the world. He says—"Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." He says to every one who calls Him Lord and Saviour, Son, daughter, thy sins are forgiven thee: go and sin no more. He sent His disciples to proclaim this Gospel, which means good news, in every nation. The good news is that Christ died as the propitiation for the sins of the world, and that God raised Him from the dead and has given Him all power in heaven and on earth. This good news has come to you as you read this message. What answer will you give the Lord Jesus?

Read His Gospel with prayer; meditate on it quietly; listen to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit speaking to you as you read. As you thus read and pray and meditate, the words of Christ will produce faith in Him, love to God, hatred of sin and the beginning of a new life of communion with God, which will bring increasing victory over sin, deeper and deeper penitence because of failures, peace of conscience, a forgiving spirit, love of your fellowmen and the assurance

that, if you die before Christ comes, He will give you a place which He has prepared for you, and that if you are alive when He comes, then, with the redeemed and blessed dead of all the ages, you will be transfigured into His likeness and shall praise and serve and reign with Him over a new earth throughout the ages.

"And this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come." Matt. 24: 14.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." Matt. 24: 35.

"I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful....He which testifieth these things saith, Surely, I come quickly, Amen, Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Revelation 21: 3-5, 22: 20.

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